Introduction

Race and Belonging among Latino Millennials

Danila is a 22-year-old second generation of Mexican descent whose narrative provides a glance at Latino millennials’ experiences as *citizens but not Americans* when she says,

> I don’t think I am an American. I would say that I am Mexican because I think based on my experiences I would identify as a Mexican. Like when people look at me they are not like “Oh yeah, she’s an American.” When they see me they think “Oh yeah, she’s Mexican.” Society doesn’t see me as an American. They see me as a Mexican. So I guess that’s why I don’t see myself as American, because others don’t see me as an American. If they don’t see me as an American, why should I see myself as an American?

Despite being U.S.-born, Danila’s everyday experiences belie her status as an American. Her physical appearance marks her as Mexican and erases her Americanness. Her experiences underscore the role of race in notions of belonging to the American imagined community. Danila is not alone. Feeling that they are *citizens but not Americans* is the underlying theme in my research on second and third generation Latino millennials.

Why does it matter that these youths feel excluded? We should pay heed to what these Latino millennials say because by sheer numbers they will inevitably have a significant social, economic and political impact on U.S. society. Latinos are the second largest racial group, and Latino millennials specifically constitute one-fifth—and the second largest segment—of the
millennial population. As the largest generational cohort of Latinos in U.S. history, these youths—who in 2017 range in age from 20 to 36—will propel the Latino population exponentially as they have children over the next two decades. Yet, we do not know much about Latino millennials beyond basic demographics, save for a few educational studies that point to their dim prospects for social mobility. Their stories tell how these U.S.-born children and grandchildren of immigrants from Latin America are becoming integrated into contemporary American society. In *Citizens but not Americans* I provide a deeper understanding of Latino millennials by examining how they understand race, experience race, and develop racialized notions of belonging.

I focus on race because in these youths’ narratives it emerges as the most meaningful social category attached to notions of belonging. As an essential social marker, race defines who belongs to the American imagined community. Race is indisputably the common thread in these narratives and plays a central role in how these young people perceive themselves, the position they occupy in the U.S. racial order, and their status as members of the polity. In exploring the centrality of race in shaping notions of belonging among Latino millennials, I argue that current racial ideas and practices impact the ways in which this group understands race, makes meaning of lived experiences as racialized subjects, and develops racialized notions of belonging that are marked by racial exclusion. Multi-dimensional and intersecting processes of racialization are particularly pronounced as Latino millennials navigate their daily lives and place within American society.

The narratives presented in this book reflect three distinct yet interrelated themes—*Latinos as an ethnorace, Latinos as a racial middle,* and *Latinos as “real” Americans*—that emerged from interviews with 96 U.S.-born Latino youths in 2009. Their narratives capture their
feelings of exclusion from the imagined American community along three dimensions—racial categorization, racial hierarchy, and national inclusion. Racialized along these three dimensions, these youths find themselves outside of the boundaries of how “American” is defined. Yet, their narratives challenge their exclusion and pushes for their recognition as Americans. These three themes are illustrated in the narrative of a 21-year-old second generation Mexican named Arielle, whose words capture the essence of what the Latino millennials in this study experience.

Arielle

Arielle is a college student who lives in the south side of Chicago in a predominantly Mexican neighborhood. Her parents are immigrants from Mexico who met in Chicago and have struggled to make a life for themselves and their children. Arielle likens her family’s experiences to that of other minority groups. She explains,

I am part of the working class. My parents do work hard but they never had the luxury of being happy and saying “Oh, I am middle class or upper class.” [They are] only happy with just being able to have a house and being in the U.S. raising their kids [with] everyone in school. I feel like I am definitely part of the working class and part of a somewhat subordinate group. Because we are a majority but we also don’t get much representation as people who are white or I think anyone who is not white [can] kind of relate to us because we are all in the same mix, [in] the same boat.

Being U.S.-born, Arielle’s views on the American dream differ from that of her immigrant parents. While her parents are content with what they have accomplished in comparison to their lives in Mexico—holding stable jobs, owning a house, sending their children to college—Arielle
notices the inequities that mark her life as a racial minority in the U.S. and that do not include the privileges enjoyed by whites. The limits of the American dream are not hidden to Arielle, who believes that despite the fast growth of the population, Latinos’ numerical majority does not translate to equality. She stresses that being a Latina, “it is like a constant struggle because even though we are growing and becoming a majority, even if the whole U.S. becomes half Hispanic, we will still be viewed as being beneath anyone who is white or American because just the fact [of] the history and the color of our skin.” To her, Latinos will continue to stand out as non-white and non-Americans even if they reach a numerical majority. Implied in Arielle’s words are the three themes—Latinos as an ethnorace, a racial middle and “real” Americans—that characterize these millennials’ narratives of belonging.

Latinos as an ethnorace—the first theme in their narratives—illustrates how the exclusion of Latinos from conventional U.S. racial categories has eroded these youths’ sense of belonging. Like Danila, Arielle is aware that from her appearance “people assume a whole list of things I could be,” but white and American are not among them. Inverting the general usage of terms, Arielle identifies racially as Mexican American and ethnically as Latino and Hispanic. Like Arielle, the Latino millennials in this study found themselves in a racial quandary knowing that they do not fit in the white or black racial categories that are imposed on them, nor do they have an officially recognized racial category to claim as their own. Yet, they assert racial labels that are meaningful to them as well as to others. In the absence of an official racial category, they appropriate ethnic and panethnic terms such as Mexican and Hispanic/Latino—just like Arielle does—as racial referents. This seemingly inconsistent racial identification pattern among the youths reflects a problematic racial categorization scheme based on abstract notions of race that do not align with how people think about, experience, or practice race in everyday life.
My analysis reveals that these youths conceptualize themselves as an ethnoracial group (see Alcoff 2006). Their ethnoracial categorization includes racial and cultural attributes about what makes up the stereotypical Latino such as “tan” skin color, Spanish language, particular food and music, family values, and Latin American ancestry. Arielle identifies skin color as a visible marker of her ethnoracial status when she says that “being a Mexican American either way I am not white, I am still a different color skin from someone else that automatically like single me out and stuff.” In addition to physical traits, Arielle points to ancestry and culture as additional markers of her ethnoracial status when she states that “I think if you are of any kind of Latino or South American descent. You know, if you can speak Spanish or you know someone in your family is from a country that speaks Spanish or something that makes you that [Latino].”

These youths know that to others, and to themselves, they constitute a separate ethnoracial group accorded to people of Latin American ancestry, even when this is not officially recognized. Having no proper designation in the U.S. racial scheme, and feeling forced to choose from racial categories (e.g. white or black) that do not befit them, Latino youths’ racial miscategorization leaves them with a diminished sense of belonging.

The second narrative—Latinos as racial middle—is rooted in the youths’ sense of marginalization derived from their subordinate status in the racial hierarchy. Just as they do not fit in conventional racial categories, these youths do not fit in a racial order characterized by a sharp color line that places whites at the top and blacks at the bottom, and that assumes that Latinos fit in one or the other side of the color line. Not fitting in these conventional racial categories, Arielle, believes that “we fall in the between, [in] the gray area” because Latinos are “viewed as being beneath anyone who is white or American.” Like Arielle, millennials
understand themselves as occupying an “intermediate” or “racial middle” social position that is lower than whites but higher than blacks.

My findings challenge the assumption that Latinos are “becoming white” and are therefore situated closer to whites in the racial hierarchy. These millennials’ narratives show that they do not locate themselves at the upper end of the racial hierarchy alongside whites. But neither do they locate themselves at the very bottom with blacks. Yet, theirs is a racial middle that tilts towards the lower echelons of the racial hierarchy—much closer to blacks’ subordinate status than to whites’ superior status. Arielle says “I definitely feel closer to pretty much the African American or other like Hispanic ethnicity. I feel like we are all kind of viewed as one big kind of groups of people that since we are not white we are automatically viewed as not bad but not good for the country or something. I can relate to that because we are all in the same boat in the end trying to fight to be equal to everybody else.” Latino millennials in general felt closer to—and had a sense of solidarity with—blacks, with whom they share a marginal status, as well as with Middle Easterners, particularly those of Arab and Muslim background.

In contrast, these youths feel distant from Asians and whites mainly because they generally have much less interaction with people from these groups. But by far the group they feel most distant from—and who they perceive as occupying a privileged position in the racial hierarchy—are whites. Arielle distances herself from whites when she says “I definitely feel different from the American, you know, white people and a few Asians simply because they haven’t had to go through the struggle we had growing up and as a grown-up they also have a upper hand you know…I don’t think they will ever truly know what it’s like to live like the life that we do. They have not always had it easy, but they had that extra push.” The youths’ self-location in the bottom half of the racial hierarchy is based on both structural and everyday
racialized experiences that mark them distinctively as non-white. These struggles make them question their status as Americans and differentiate them from whites and Asians who they view as occupying an advantageous position.

The last theme—Latinos as “real” Americans—speaks to the youths’ struggle to insert themselves within the boundaries that define who is American. Despite their birthright citizenship, upbringing and socialization into American culture, these youths are reluctant to call themselves Americans. This reluctance sprouts from their ethnoracial exclusion—or their inability to meet the racial and cultural traits required to be seen as full-fledged members of the American imagined community. Using familiar American tropes, these youths offer a counter-narrative that challenges their ethnoracial exclusion and demands inclusion on their own terms.

Like most of the Latino millennials, Arielle understands herself as a citizen mainly because “I was born here, I have my papers straight, they’ve been straight since birth.” For Arielle, birthright or naturalization are the criteria for citizenship. Yet, her answer falters when asked how she understands herself as an American. She says that “when I think of the term American, the first thing I think of is like any person being born in the U.S, or actually any Caucasian or white person who is being raised in this country all their life on American values from back in the day pretty much…I think technically anyone who is born in the U.S will be American.” While “technically” an American is anyone born in the U.S., there are racial (white), cultural (values), and generational (from back in the day) criteria to being American that Arielle does not meet. Arielle states that “the only reason why I fit into this definition is because I am Mexican American because obviously I am not 100% Mexican. I was not born in Mexico, but since I was born in the U.S that make just the term, just a label of American, but I am Mexican because that’s what both of my parents are and that is how I was raised.” Although she is
technically American, Arielle uses the hyphenated American term Mexican-American to denote
that she is U.S.-born of Mexican descent. Like Arielle, those youths who identify as hyphenated
American do so to distinguish themselves from their foreign-born counterparts.

Being othered as non-citizens and non-Americans, these youths develop an awareness and
an understanding of the limits of citizenship and Americanness. Although they are citizens by
birth, they are aware that they are seen by non-Latinos as noncitizens because their Latin
American ancestry—disclosed by their looks, cultural manners, and/or surname—points to their
immigrant background. Conjectures about their immigrant roots call into question their legality,
as others assume that anyone who is “Latino” must be undocumented. Arielle faces the stigma of
“illegality” in everyday life such as “the student who never experienced other races
automatically thought that my family you know had a lawn mowing business or they thought
they were illegal and that was not true.” She adds that “when I encounter people who are against
immigration and they see that I am Mexican or Latino or Hispanic descent, they view me as
‘You people are always coming here illegally’ or they automatically think that I am an
immigrant or I am here illegally or my family are related to being illegal and they do not see the
whole story.” These racialized experiences erode Arielle’s sense of belonging and lead her to
form a pragmatic view of belonging that stresses legal rather than cultural membership in the
American imagined community.

In *Citizens but not Americans*, I examine the effect of racialization on Latino millennials’
understanding of their marginal status in U.S. society. Ancestry, skin color and phenotype, social
class, education, gender, language and culture converge and shape how these youths experience
and navigate everyday racialization. Racialized along three dimensions—as an ethnorace, as a
racial middle and as not “real” Americans—these youths remain outside of the boundaries of
“American.” Identifying as *citizens but not Americans* belies their status as full members of U.S. society and points to the entrenchment of race in notions of belonging to the American imagined community. My purpose in writing this book is to contribute to our understanding of Latino millennials’ place in U.S. society, and particularly of how they make sense of themselves as Americans. In order to understand why these youths feel they are *citizens but not Americans*, we need to examine how they come to understand, develop and define themselves as such.

**Race as a Social Construct**

In examining how these youths come to understand, develop and define themselves as *citizens but not Americans*, I use a social constructionist theoretical framework. Like Omi and Winant (2014), I view race as a fundamental organizing principle in U.S. society, but one that is socially constructed. This approach posits that race has no factual scientific biological basis and that its relevance is due to the social meaning given to physical or phenotypical characteristics. Through the process of “race-making”, people are “othered,” or made different, based on their physical features, but this “othering” also includes cultural traits. In “othering,” a group’s presumed physical and cultural characteristics are essentialized and believed to be endemic. Racialization happens when racial meaning is given to a group, and that group’s categorization is created and recreated in social interactions and structures.

As Omi and Winant (2014) pose, race is ubiquitous such that it is embedded in individual and institutional social relations and is deep-seated in social, economic, political and cultural structures that permeate everyday life. The perniciousness of this racial social system lies in its quotidian and increasingly elusive nature with a popular discourse on colorblindness that underplays the continuing significance of race. Bobo and Smith (1998) argue that the systematic, overt and violent racism that characterized the Jim Crow era has been replaced by gentler laissez
faire racism. Likewise, Bonilla-Silva (2003; 2013) argues that this post-Civil Rights racism is characterized by the re-articulation of racism in seemingly imperceptible and covert ways. Today’s racism is manifested in the repeated and frequent discrimination that happens in everyday life (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Bonilla-Silva 2013; Essed 1991; Feagin and Cobas 2014) and which are manifested in what Pierce et al (1978) has labeled racial microaggressions. These everyday “put-downs” directed at a person or group are intended to exclude and marginalize racial groups as inferior and undesirable (Pierce et al 1978). Reflected in ideologies, policies and practices that disadvantage non-white people in order to protect white privilege, race has real and definite social consequences for different racial groups (Bonilla-Silva 2003; 2013; Omi and Winant 2014).

In the U.S., race is characterized by a sharp color line that divides whites and blacks, and a racial hierarchy that parallels the distribution and access to resources. This color line is closely guarded by clearly demarcated racial boundaries that are policed in informal and formal ways by individuals, institutions and the state. While individual policing takes the form of prejudice and discrimination, institutional and state policing of racial boundaries involves unequal access to resources as well as legalized and institutionalized forms of surveillance, profiling, confinement, incarceration, and violence directed at racial minority groups (Omi and Winant 2014). The institutionalization of Latino racialization permeates Latinos’ daily life experiences and impacts their life chances.

In this book, I unpack the process of “race-making” by examining how Latino millennials experience “othering” in everyday life and how these experiences shape their understanding of themselves as marginal members of the U.S. polity. While staying firmly grounded in sociology, I use an interdisciplinary approach that borrows concepts developed by political scientists,
historians, anthropologists, philosophers and legal scholars to examine the centrality of race to young Latinos’ understanding of themselves and their social positions. I also use an intersectional lens to unravel the complexities of Latinos’ self-understandings that lead to a diminished sense of belonging to the national community. In simple terms, intersectionality examines the ways that various forms of discrimination, oppression, and privilege act together. It also draws attention to the obvious and not-so-obvious connections between different social categorizations such as race, gender, sexuality, legal status and social class. While each of these social categorizations individually increases or decreases chances for discrimination, when combined, the chances and impacts of discrimination may magnify or lessen. Intersectionality purposely engages in linking social categorizations to uncover how particular connections—or configurations—minimize or accentuate social articulations such as racial identification. An intersectional approach thus provides the critical means—and the analytical power—required to identify how members of the same group experience racial dynamics differently, and are impacted differently, due to their specific locations within interlocking systems of oppression.

Although I draw on an intersectional approach to guide my analysis of the experiences that youth articulated in their interviews, its application is not always obvious because many of their experiences were a matter of degree rather than kind. I made an intentional effort to apply an intersectional lens whenever the data permitted to do so, allowing me to make note of those instances in which the collusion of race, gender, legal status and/or social class had an effect on the frequency, intensity, and type of racial experiences as well as the youths’ responses to these experiences. These approaches—interdisciplinary and intersectional—allow me to develop a more complex understanding of how race is conceptualized and experienced by U.S. born Latino millennials. By identifying and untangling the multidimensional process of racialization, I show
how intersecting forms of exclusion lead Latino youths to develop subjectivities that signal their marginal status in U.S. society. By understanding how Latino millennials are racialized, we can gain insights into why these youths feel that they are *citizens but not Americans*.

The Racialization of Citizenship and Americanness

This book is grounded in Castles’ and Davidson’s (2000) notion of *citizens who do not belong*. Castles and Davidson argue that there are citizens whose ethnic, racial or religious backgrounds highlight their cultural differences and limit their access to the rights and privileges of citizenship. They pose that belonging to the nation-state requires both political as well as cultural membership. Political membership is based on documentation such as birthright or naturalization and imparts civil, political and social rights to its bearers. Cultural membership is based on cultural homogeneity—manifested in shared values and ideals—such that assimilation is required in order to belong. Thus, there can be citizens who despite their political membership do not enjoy all the rights of citizenship because of “cultural” exclusion based on race, ethnicity, class, gender or religion. They are what historian Mae Ngai (2007) calls the *alien citizen* and which she describes as citizens by birth whose immigrant ancestry, discernible by racial and cultural traits, marks them indelibly as foreigners and renders their status as citizens and Americans dubious. By having their political and cultural membership questioned, these groups are positioned outside the boundaries that define who is a citizen and an American. That is, they are otherized as non-citizen and non-American.

Ngai’s notion of the alien citizen is tied to the racialization of U.S. citizenship and American national identity as white. As whiteness became the prerequisite for becoming both a citizen and an American, those defined as non-white were deemed foreigners, unassimilable and
banned from access to naturalization (Carbado 2005; Haney Lopez 2006; Ngai 2007). As a result of the racialization of citizenship and Americanness as white, non-white groups continue to be imagined as foreigners as this label extends to subsequent generations (Carbado 2005; Jimenez 2010; Ngai 2007; Tuan 1999). Alienage is then a permanent condition (Ngai 2007) and these groups remain forever foreigners (Tuan 1999) and permanent immigrant groups (Jimenez 2010) despite their historical presence and longstanding status as U.S. citizens. As their marginalization endures through the generations, minority groups come to define themselves collectively through their exclusion (Castles and Davidson 2000). Although I use the phrase citizens but not Americans to describe the Latino millennials’ feelings of exclusion from the American imagined community, this phrase conveys the notion that these youths are both citizens who do not belong and alien citizens.

To understand why Latino millennials feel they are citizens but not Americans, we need to review the social, political and historical processes involved in the construction of Latinos as citizens who do not belong and alien citizens. These processes were underway by the time of the annexation of Mexican territory in 1848, and the colonization of Puerto Rico in 1898, which construed the inhabitants of these territories—and those of Mexican and Puerto Rican national origin—largely as white and thus eligible for citizenship. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo stipulated that U.S. citizenship would be extended to Mexican citizens of the annexed territory. Puerto Ricans were also largely defined as white because as Duany (2002:247) argues, in a society that defined itself as white, classifying the Puerto Rican population as mostly white “helped to allay the common racist fear that the U.S. government had annexed a predominantly black population after the War of 1898.” While these populations were defined largely as white for citizenship purposes, they were not commonly understood as white. As historians and legal
scholars show, being “white by law” made Mexicans eligible for citizenship but socially they remained non-whites (Almaguer 2008; Gomez 2007; Haney Lopez 2006; Menchaca 2002; Molina 2014). That is, in everyday life, they were treated as non-whites. Scholars add that in common understanding and practice, Mexicans occupied a social position distinct from whites, blacks, Asians and American Indians (Almaguer 2008; Menchaca 2002; Molina 2014). Marked by their ethnicity which distinguished them from other (European descent) whites, Latinos remained a “race apart” or “off-white” (Almaguer 2008; Gomez 2007; Hayes-Bautista and Chapa 1987; Menchaca 2002). These notions applied to Puerto Ricans and subsequently to all Latin Americans—they were citizens by law but certainly they were not Americans by common understanding.

Paradoxically, Latinos’ “whiteness” was a basis for what legal scholar Devon Carbado (2005) calls inclusive exclusion. Carbado argues that groups defined as non-white or non-American occupy a position of racial liminality that renders them simultaneously as insiders and outsiders. He likens this racial liminality to being “foreign in a domestic sense.” He argues that groups experience inclusive exclusion when they encounter exclusion from citizenship, exclusion from the imagined American community, and/or exclusion from equal rights and opportunities. Latinos can be described as experiencing inclusive exclusion. As “white ethnics,” Latinos had access to citizenship and some of its perks, but their ethnicity became the basis for exclusion from Americanness and from the full rights and privileges of citizenship. As Fox and Guglielmo (2012) put it, Latinos were boundary straddlers because in some instances they counted as whites and in others they were non-white. That is, sometimes they were included and at other times they were excluded. Latinos often deployed their whiteness in claims making to gain access to resources such as citizenship, voting rights and white schools but their ethnicity
was in turn used to deny them full access to other rights and privileges. While black exclusion was based on their assumed racial inferiority, Latinos’ exclusion was based on their assumed cultural inferiority. In other words, blacks were excluded because they were not white and Latinos were excluded because they were culturally inferior “whites.” Regardless of its basis, both groups’ exclusion involved their legal and social separation from whites. For instance, Mexicans’ segregation into all-Mexican schools and classrooms was based not on the legal separation of races, since Mexicans were considered “white by law” but on their presumed linguistic and cultural differences (McDonald 2004; Valencia 1991). Mexicans’ whiteness was also the basis for differential justice as a jury of non-Latino whites constituted a jury of peers in cases where the defendant was Mexican (Haney Lopez 2004). Mexicans and Puerto Ricans also counted as whites in integration efforts. As Fernandez (2013) shows, racial integration in Chicago’s public housing was achieved by counting Mexican and Puerto Ricans as whites.

In the early 20th Century, Latinos’ exclusion expanded beyond assumed cultural inferiority as their citizenship status increasingly came into question. By 1924, this exclusion was embodied in what Molina (2014) calls an *immigration regime* which redefined Mexicans, and by extension all Latino groups, not only as immigrants but as undocumented. It is at this time that the U.S.-Mexico border became problematized as the source of unauthorized immigration leading to the creation of the Border Patrol and the enactment of border enforcement (Ngai 2004). This assumed illegality extended to U.S.-born Mexicans, many of who were deported along Mexican nationals during the 1930s and again in the 1950s (Ngai 2004). In the 1990s, the Border Patrol deployed three initiatives to deter unauthorized immigration from Mexico. Operations Hold the Line, Gatekeeper, and Safeguard led to the extension of the fence separating the U.S. and Mexico, increased surveillance along the border, and accelerated
processing of those crossing without authorization. Along with border and immigration enforcement came other measures aimed at curbing the growth of the Latino population such as the involuntary sterilization of Mexican and Puerto Rican women (Chavez 2013; Gutierrez 2008; Lopez 2008), and a push to deny public services and assistance to undocumented immigrants in California through Proposition 187 (Hayes Bautista 2004; Perea 1997). Most damaging were a series of federal laws that increasingly restricted immigrant rights and extended immigration enforcement. More recently, there has been promotion of English-only legislation, attempts to dismantle birthright citizenship from children born to immigrant mothers who are dubbed as anchor babies (Chavez 2013, Ngai 2007), and recent local laws that criminalize Latino immigrants (Varsanyi 2010).

The legacy of the racialization of citizenship and Latinos’ status as alien citizens is manifested today in the public perception of Latinos as “immigrants” “foreigners” and as “illegals” (Oboler 1995; Omi and Winant 2014, Rosaldo 1997; Rosaldo and Flores 1997). “Illegal immigrant” has also come to mean “Mexican” and is often applied to anyone who looks Mexican regardless of legal status, or ethnic/national origin (Chavez 2013; DeGenova 2005; Oboler 1995; Omi and Winant 2014, Rosaldo 1997; Rosaldo and Flores 1997; Santa Ana 2002). These images and assumptions spill into the U.S.-born Latino population and mark them also as immigrants and “illegals.” My previous work on youth participation in the immigrant rights marches of 2006 and 2007 show that U.S.-born youth participated due to their racialization as “illegals” (Flores-González 2010). Despite their citizenship, they continue to be marked as alien citizens and both their citizenship and Americanness challenged.

The legalization of Mexicans, and its extension to Latinos, has been accompanied by the construction of Mexicans—and Latinos in general—as the most serious threat to American
society (Chavez 2013; Santa Anna 2002). The “brown scare” likens Mexican immigration to invaders that threaten to sweep away the American way of life (Santa Anna 2002). Historian Samuel Huntington (2004) exemplified this anti-Latino sentiment when he argued that Mexicans, and other Latinos, are unassimilable as they refuse to adopt the Anglo-Protestant-based American creed and culture and continue to segregate themselves culturally, geographically and economically. To him, the persistence of Mexican ethnicity will be “the end of the America we have known for more than three centuries (2004:45).” Huntington ignores the socio-historical processes and structural factors that define “American” as white and Anglo-Saxon, that shaped and continue to shape the cultural, geographical and economic segregation of Latinos, and that deny Latinos recognition and full rights as members of the polity. The “Latino threat” has refueled the immigration regime leading to the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border, record number of deportations under President Obama’s administration, and calls for the deportation without hearings for unaccompanied minors caught crossing the border. The Latino threat also powered Donald Trump’s campaign call to “Make America Great Again,” by painting Mexican immigrants—and by extension all Latinos—as illegals, criminals and rapists, and pushing for the building of a wall to seal off the U.S.-Mexico border and an increase in deportations. This rhetoric has led to the construction of undocumented immigrants as undeserving, and because Mexicans—and other Latinos—are singled out as the “illegals”, this image casts a shadow on U.S-born Latinos in terms of their citizenship and Americanness. It is in this socio-historical context that Latino millennials construct notions of citizenship and belonging.

The *Hispanic* and *Latino* Category
A prominent feature in the otherization of Latinos as *citizens but not Americans* is their classification as a (pan)ethnic rather than a racial group. Their historical racialization as *legally white but socially nonwhite* stressed their cultural rather than racial difference from whites paving the way for panethnicity to emerge. Despite national origin, racial, class, linguistic, cultural, gender, and legal status differences, the term Hispanic homogenizes people of Latin American ancestry based on their assumed common heritage and shared cultural traits, particularly the Spanish language. Research on Hispanic panethnicity explore three articulations of panethnicity: institutional, communal and individual. Recognizing these three strands is essential to understand why Latino millennials embrace panethnic identification along with national origin identification, and often use it as a proxy for race.

First, the institutionalization of Hispanic panethnicity is due to three different organizational actors who in collusion, but for their own interests, helped to formalize it as an official category, and led to its acceptance and widespread use as a descriptor for people of Latin American descent. In *Making Hispanics*, Cristina Mora (2014) poses that the grouping of Latinos under the Hispanic panethnic category responded to political, social and economic interests by three institutional actors: the state, Latino activists, and the media (Mora 2009; 2014). The State’s early attempts to identify the Latino population relied on reporting of foreign birth or parentage, Spanish language spoken at home, or Spanish surname. As a result, many Latinos who were third or subsequent generation, did not speak Spanish, or did not have a Spanish surname (as a result of marriage or intermarriage) were not identified as part of the Latino population (Chapa 2000). In the era of civil rights, the need to accurately count, and identify Latinos intensified (Chapa 2000) and the federal government—prompted by Latino activists—
adopted the term *Hispanic* as the legal designation for people of Latin American ancestry (Hatham 2007; Mora 2009).

Recognizing the economic, social and political interests at stake with the passing of civil rights legislation, Latino activists pushed for, and embraced, the state’s Hispanic panethnic categorization and efforts to more accurately count this segment of the population (DeSipio 1986; Mora 2014; Oboler 1992, 1995). Other grassroots activists rejected the state’s imposition of the term Hispanic due to its direct association with Spain and its colonial legacy in the Americas and joined the panethnic movement by coining and adopting the term *Latino* (Calderon 1992). Regardless of which term they adopted, Rodriguez-Muñiz (2015) contends that national civil rights organizations engaged in the politics of demography by supporting the enumeration of the Latino population to justify their claims for legitimacy and political power. What followed was the evolution of cultural, social and political single national origin organizations into panethnic organizations (Itzigsohn 2009; Mora 2014; Ricourt and Danta 2003). In *The Trouble with Unity*, Cristina Beltran (2010) argues that Latino panethnicity gives the illusion of a unified Latino political body with common political interests and policy agenda. The challenge of Latino unity then lies in how to bring together people who are perceived to share cultural characteristics but who sometimes hold different political ideologies and agendas.

In concert with the state and Latino activists, the media and advertising/marketing industry’s branding and marketing of Hispanics for general consumption or as a niche market also contributed to the labeling, homogenization and institutionalization of Latinos as a distinct panethnic group (Mora 2009, 2014). Scholars argue that the media, creates and recreates an “unaccented,” “sanitized” and “white washed” Latino identity free of intra-ethnic rivalry by downplaying national origins and re-nationalizing them as *Hispanic or Latino* (Dávila 2008;
Dávila (2001) argues that these “unaccented” images brand and label them as a distinct (and foreign) group rather than normalizing Latinos as part of U.S. society. Dávila (2001; 2008) further argues that commercial representations of Latinos, although skewed, contributes to the development of a cultural identity among Latinos that ultimately distinguishes them from whites but also from other minorities which who they share experiences of racialization (Dávila 2001, 2008).

Second, the basis for the institutionalization of Hispanic panethnicity rested on the emotional connections felt by Latinos of different national origin. Early panethic sentiment was grounded on the similar cultural, social and political experiences, as well as the common experiences of migration, discrimination and low socioeconomic status that Latinos encountered in the U.S., yet the development of these connections was limited by the historical concentration of Latino subgroups in different regions of the country (DeSipio 1986). Growing diversity and dispersal of the Latino population has resulted in increased contact between Latinos groups leading to what Ricourt and Danta (2003) call experiential panethnicity or daily interactions between Latinos of different national origins who mingle in families, neighborhoods, school, work and churches. These convivencias diarias or daily-life experiences strengthen ties and solidarity between groups (Itzigsohn 2009; Perez 2003; Ricourt and Danta 2003; Rodríguez-Muñiz 2010; Rúa 2001). As these groups interact, structural differences take a back seat as commonalities become more salient. Ricourt and Danta argue that proximity and daily interaction lead to the development of categorical panethnicity as Latinos come to see themselves as part of one larger group. This sense of Latinidad emerges from the affective ties that form through daily interaction yet it does not develop at the expense of national origin.
identities. That is, panethnic and national origin identities coexist, and often go hand in hand (Garcia and Rúa 2007; Ricourt and Danta 2003).

Third, the communal sense of Latinidad that emerged through daily interactions, paired with the increasing institutionalization and popularization of panethnic labels, led to the individual adoption of panethnic identification among Latinos. Studies show that although Latinos identify primordially by national origin, there is a significant increase in those who identify panethnically as *Latino* or *Hispanic*, particularly among younger cohorts (Hitlin, Brown and Elder Jr. 2007; Oboler 1992; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Telles and Ortiz 2008). Fraga et al. (2010) found that a “supermajority of respondents” strongly identified with panethnic labels while strongly identifying by national origin too. Scholars argue that panethnic labels are “addenda” or secondary identities that are neither instrumental nor an expression of solidarity, but rather they are all-purpose identities to which Latinos grow attached to and identify with in addition to national origin (Itzigsohn 2004; Itzigsohn and Dore-Cabral 2000; Jones-Correa and Leal 1996; Oboler 1992; Telles and Ortiz 2008). They add that Latinos hold a multiplicity of identities simultaneously and that these identities are not mutually exclusive and thus provide them with identity options to select from, or activate, in different contexts depending on with whom, what, where, and when the interaction takes place (Fraga et al. 2010; Itzigsohn 2004; McConnell and Delgado-Romero 2004; Rodriguez 2000; Schmidt, Barvosa-Carter and Torres 2000). Recent research point to the racial connotations of panethnic labels as shown in their increased use for racial identification (Dowling 2014; Flores-González, Vaquera and Aranda 2015; Flores-González 1999; Frank, Akresh and Lu 2010; Hitlin, Brown and Elder Jr 2007; Itzigsohn 2005; Perez and Hirschman 2009; Roth 2012).

Factors such as nativity, language use, age, gender, education, religious affiliation,
generation, discrimination, national origin, region, segregation, and skin color affect Latinos’ identity choices (Campbell and Rogalin 2006; Eschbach and Gomez 1998; Golash-Boza 2006; Holley et al. 2009; Jones-Correa and Leal 1996; Perez and Hirschman 2009; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Telles and Ortiz 2008). Taylor et al (2012) found that nativity and language are the “strongest predictors of identity preferences” among Latinos. Foreign birth (and having foreign born parents), living in the Southwest region, living in a predominantly Latino neighborhood, having Spanish spoken at home, being darker skin, and experiencing discrimination, are factors that strengthen national origin identification (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Taylor et al 2012; Telles and Ortiz 2008). Panethnic identities are most common among native-born growing up after civil rights, who speak Spanish at home, live in a city with a large Latino population, and experience discrimination (Campbell and Rogalin 2006; Masuoka 2006; Perez and Hirschman 2009; Telles and Ortiz). In a study of second generation adolescents of Latin America, Caribbean, and Asian origin, Rumbaut (1994) found that panethnic identification is higher among youth who are female, native born, not-affluent, inner-city residents, and experience discrimination. These panethnic identities are also more common among those of mixed Latino origin (Aparicio 2016; Flores-González 1999; Rúa 2001).

Other studies show that pan-ethnic identification is more marked among younger U.S.-born Latinos than immigrants and older U.S.-born Latinos (Hitlin, Brown and Elder Jr. 2007; Oboler 1992; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Telles and Ortiz 2008). These intergenerational differences reflect their different experiences growing up. Immigrants can summon a national identity based on their experiences growing up in their home countries but the second generation has only their U.S. based experiences. In addition to generational differences, there are cohort differences that account for younger Latinos’ greater ease in identifying panethnically. These
youths have grown at a time when these terms are already institutionalized and are part of everyday life, making them more likely to embrace this identity.

The Chicago Context

The Chicago area, with its confluence of demographic, social and political dynamics presents a unique site for studying Latino identity, and particularly panethnicity among Latino millennials. For the past 70 years, Chicago has consistently held one of the largest concentrations of Latinos in the nation. With over 2 million Latinos, the Chicago Metropolitan Area (CMA) now has the fifth largest Latino population in the nation, and Cook County—where Chicago is located—ranks fourth in the nation (Brown and Lopez 2013). Latinos’ share of the Chicago population grew from 14 percent to 28.9 percent from 1980 to 2010. The concentration of Latinos in suburban Chicago has precipitously increased in the past two decades. Attracted by job opportunities, Latin American immigrants, mostly Mexican, are bypassing the city and settling in these new suburban Chicago destinations, as well as exurban and rural communities further from the city core. The suburbanization of Latinos was evident by 2004, when 54 percent of Latinos in the state lived in Chicago’s suburbs (Ready and Brown-Gort 2005). By 2010, 57 percent of Latinos lived in the suburbs and constituted 18 percent of the suburban population, (Guzman, Brown-Gort, Deliyannides, Knight 2010). In suburban Cook County, the Latino population grew by 46.5 percent from 2000 to 2010 (Sledge 2011).

Chicago’s Latino population is characterized by its youthfulness, U.S. birth, and citizenship status. The Latino median age is 27, but there are marked age differences by nativity: the foreign-born median age is 39 while the U.S.-born median age is 16 (Pew Hispanic Center 2010). A whopping 82 percent of Latinos age 29 or under are U.S.-born, and 93 percent of
Latinos 17 and under are U.S.-born (Pew Hispanic Center 2010). Around 58 percent of the CMA Latino population is U.S.-born, and 73 percent of Latinos in the CMA are citizens (Pew Hispanic Center 2010). Among the foreign-born, 60 percent are adults, two-thirds arrived in the U.S. after 1990 and 31 percent are naturalized U.S. citizens (Pew Hispanic Center 2010). There are roughly equal numbers of male and female Latinos in the CMA, although men slightly outnumber women among the 25-39 age group. The magnitude of Latinos’ youthfulness and growing numbers is best captured in school enrollment figures. In the CMA, Latino students make up 29 percent of the student population (Guzman, Brown-Gort, Deliyannides, Knight 2010). In the Chicago Public Schools (CPS), Latinos constitute 45 percent of the student population. In suburban CMA, Latino enrollment increased 60 percent over the past decade, bringing up the Latino student population to 23 percent (Guzman, Brown-Gort, Deliyannides, Knight 2010). Additionally, the two local 4-year public universities are Hispanic Serving Institutions.

Chicago’s importance in Latino historiography does not lie solely on its relevance as a traditional Latino immigrant gateway, or the sheer numbers of Latinos, or the youthfulness of its population, but rather on the historical diversity of the Latino population in Chicago, and the intra-Latino dynamics that fostered the early development of Latino panethnicity. Unlike other U.S. regions where single Latino populations predominated until the past two decades, major Latino groups have a historical presence in Chicago since the 1940s with the establishment of Mexican and Puerto Rican communities, and with a smaller but significant Cuban presence by 1970 (Fernandez 2012; Inis-Jimenez 2013; Padilla 1985). Since the 1980s, increasing numbers of Guatemalans, Ecuadorians and a sprinkle of other Latino groups have made Chicago their home. In 2010, the Latino population in the CMA is overwhelmingly Mexican (84%) but has a
significant Puerto Rican population (10%) and smaller numbers of Guatemalan, Ecuadorian, Colombian and other Latino groups (Brown and Lopez 2013).

Despite national diversity among Latinos in Chicago, these groups share a similar context of reception marked by their racialization as “other” in a racially divided city. Fernandez (2012) argues that the Mexican and Puerto Rican experiences in Chicago have much in common. Both groups became pawns in the racial stratification that characterizes the city: from residential segregation to employment discrimination. Upon arrival to Chicago, these groups concentrated in different parts of the city, but these early communities were not isolated from each other as racial discrimination often brought Mexicans, Puerto Ricans and Cubans together at the few Catholic churches, restaurant, and dance halls that welcomed them, and at factory floors (Padilla 1947; Padilla 1985). Today, Latino groups continue to concentrate in particular areas of the city; however, in these areas, Latinos of different national origin increasingly live and work side by side and attend the same schools and churches. The increasing diversification of the Latino population means that Latino millennials are more likely to interact with members of other Latino groups more often and in diverse contexts.

The cohabitation of multiple Latino groups for the past six decades has had a profound effect on intra-Latino dynamics in Chicago (see Aparicio 2016; DeGenova and Ramos-Zayas 2003; Fernandez 2012; Padilla 1947; Padilla 1985; Pallares and Flores-González 2010; Perez 2003; Rúa 2011). Indeed, the presence of diverse Latino groups with common struggles of displacement and discrimination led to early expressions of Latino panethnicity in Chicago. In a pioneering study of Puerto Ricans and Mexicans, Elena Padilla (1947) documents a growing panethnic sentiment—in spite of some tension—among Mexican and Puerto Ricans in the 1940s. Despite early manifestations of Latinidad—a shared sense of identity—Elena Padilla incorrectly
predicted that Puerto Ricans would become absorbed by the Mexican population. Forty years later, Felix Padilla (1985) argued in his seminal work *Latino Ethnic Consciousness* that a panethnic political awareness among Mexican and Puerto Rican activists, which he labeled *Latinismo*, had developed in Chicago. Fueled by shared experiences of discrimination, and deploying a discourse of cultural similarity, Mexicans and Puerto Ricans rallied together to fight for their educational, political and economic rights (Padilla 1985). Felix Padilla argued that although the basis of commonality for Puerto Ricans and Mexicans laid in their assumed cultural similarity, the driving force for *Latinismo* was a common fate as a marginalized and maligned group that led to temporary political coalitions between these groups.

Studying the interaction between Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in Chicago, DeGenova and Ramos-Zayas (2003) argue that the “unequal politics of citizenship”—signified by Puerto Ricans’ undeniable status as U.S. citizens and Mexicans’ questionable legal status—stand in the way of long-lasting panethnic unity. Other scholars acknowledge the role of citizenship in Chicago’s Latino intra-dynamics but downplay its salience arguing that *Latinidad* is not necessarily fraught with contention over the issue of citizenship (Aparicio 2016, 2016; Flores-Gonzalez and Rodríguez-Muniz 2014; García and Rúa 2007; Pérez 2003; Rodríguez-Muñiz 2010; Rúa 2001). Pérez (2003) found that Puerto Rican and Mexican women in Chicago hold strong opinions about each other: while Mexican women view Puerto Rican women as *rencorosas* (spiteful), Puerto Rican women view Mexican women as *sufridas* (long-suffering women). Despite these strong opinions, Puerto Rican and Mexican women got along and often had very close relationships with each other through community, work or familial ties. In a study of ethnic festivals in Chicago, Garcia and Rúa (2007) noticed the deployment of both national and panethnic identities at ethnic festivals that although fraught with some tension did not lead to
inter-group rivalry but rather to tolerance, providing spaces for their concurrent expression and co-existence. Also, research on the 2006 immigrant marches in Chicago show that by construing racialized experiences as “similar, but not identical,” Puerto Ricans were moved to join this “Mexican” political struggle (Rodríguez-Muñiz 2010; Flores-González and Rodríguez-Muñiz 2014). In a study of Mexican and Puerto Rican student interaction in a Chicago high school, Rosa (2014:37) found what Rivera-Servera (2012) calls *frictive intimacy*, or the development of “intimate knowledge of both Mexicanness and Puerto Ricanness. . . . often reflected in the invocation of various stereotypes about one another’s physical appearance, musical tastes, styles of dress, and language use.” He also found that despite recognizing these differences and asserting their own national identities, these youths identified panethnically and found a common ground. This historical context of panethnic identity formation informs Chicago Latino millennials’ notions on identity and belonging.

**Latino Millennials**

To fully grasp why the young participants see themselves as *citizens but not Americans*, I utilize the concept of “generations” as an analytical lens. A generational approach to the study of Latino racialization may include “generation since immigration”, “generations over time”, “generation as an age group”, and/or “generation as an historical cohort.” Studies on “generation since immigration” compare the first, 1.5, second, third and subsequent generations, or they lump these groups into the foreign-born (1st generation) and the native born (2+ generation) populations. For example, Wendy Roth (2012) in *Race Migrations: Latinos and the Cultural Transformation of Race* compares changing notions of race among Puerto Rican and Dominican immigrants and non-immigrants “back home.” Julie Dowling’s (2014) *Mexican Americans and the Race Question* examines racial identification among immigrant and U.S.-born Mexican
origin adults in three Texas locations. And Tomas Jimenez’ (2010) *Replenished Ethnicity: Mexican Americans, Immigration, and Identity* studies integration among “later-generation” or “third and subsequent generation” Mexican Americans who trace their family settlement in the U.S. prior to 1940.

Other studies take on a “generations over time” approach that focuses on different familial generations—that is differences between grandparents, parents and children within the same family. For example, Jessica Vasquez’s (2011) *Mexican Americans across Generations: Immigrant Families, Racial Realities* examines racial identity formation in three generations within the same families. In their groundbreaking book *Generations of Exclusion: Mexican-Americans, Assimilation, and Race*, Edward Telles and Vilma Ortiz (2008) utilize a two-dimensional lens by focusing on “generation-since-immigration” and “generation over time” in their analysis of intergenerational integration among Mexican Americans in Los Angeles and San Antonio.

The “generation as an age group” lens examines Latino racialization and integration by dividing the population into different age groups, such as “17 and under” and “18 or over” or focusing on a particular age group. Most notable among these works is Alejandro Portes and Ruben Rumbaut’s (2001) book *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second* which focuses on different measures of acculturation (such as educational attainment, language, racial identification, and mobility) among second generation youth in Miami and San Diego.

Finally, research on Latino “social generations” or “cohorts” focuses on Latinos who were born, and came of age, during a particular historical time and thus share a common social, economic and political context. Carlos Munoz’s (2007) groundbreaking book *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement* details the historic struggles of Chicano youth during the civil
rights era. More recently, *Brokered Boundaries: Immigrant Identity in Anti-immigrant Times* by Douglas Massey and Magaly Sanchez (2010) examines how current political, social and economic conditions shape identity among first and second generation Latinos. Differently from these studies, I use “generation” as a multidimensional analytical lens to examine how a historical moment shapes how a particular “social generation” (Latino Millennials), “generational age group” (14 to 30 year olds at the time of the study, and “generation since immigration” (U.S. born second and third generation) experience racialization and understand their place in U.S. society.

Generally, ‘millennials’ (or as they are often called Generation Y, or Generation Next) refers to people born between 1980 and 1995. Millennials are known as the “net” or “digital” generation, or as “digital natives” because they are the first generation to grow with technology and to use social media to connect with others (Bennett, Maton, and Kervin 2008; Dungy 2011; Pew 2014). Dungy (2011) identified this generations’ defining moments as September 11, 2001, high school and campus shootings, mobile phones and social networks, YouTube, Wikipedia, the 2008 recession, and the election of U.S. President Barack Obama. As a group, millennials are by far the most racially diverse and politically liberal generation and generally support same-sex marriage, interracial marriage and the legalization of marijuana (Pew 2014). This generation is also more economically insecure and face more debt and lower economic prospects than previous generations (Pew 2014).

Latino millennials share many of the traits that characterize the millennial generation more generally, but racialization processes shape their social, economic and political experiences in particular ways. We need to take into account these cohort-specific experiences to understand why Latino millennials see their position in U.S. society as marginal. The social, economic and
political moments that mark Latino millennials differ from those of previous cohorts. The Latino Baby-boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, consisted mostly of Mexicans and Puerto Ricans who grew up during the post-WWII economic boom and came of age in the Civil Rights era. They were raised by “Mexican American generation” parents who emphasized assimilation as the road to mobility. Failing to achieve mobility, they became politicized during the civil rights era and made demands for equality through the American G.I. Forum, Chicano Movement, Brown Berets and Young Lords.

Born between 1965 and 1980, the Latino Generation X reaped the gains from the expanding educational and economic opportunities that resulted from civil rights legislation and affirmative action programs. This generation also witnessed an increase in immigration from Central, South America and the Caribbean that diversified Latino communities, and the enactment of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) which granted permanent residence and set 2.7 million undocumented immigrants on the path to citizenship—the bulk of whom were Latinos. Despite these gains, Generation Xers were tainted with notions of juvenile super-predators that casted Black and Latino youth as a new breed of violent and remorseless criminal that led to stricter zero tolerance and three-strike laws, lengthier sentences, trial of minors as adults, and increasing rates of incarceration for minority youth.

As a result of increased Central and South American migration starting in the 1980s, Latino millennials—born roughly between 1980 and 1995—are the most diverse Latino generational cohort. Reflecting this diversity, as well as political and media influences, they grew up with the terms “Hispanic” and “Latino” in the popular lexicon and in everyday life. Latino millennials are also a generation that increasingly grew up away from traditional immigrant gateways, in new immigrant destinations in suburban and rural destinations. Although some of
their families benefitted from the 1986 IRCA, what they remember is the increasingly restrictive national and local immigration policies and enforcement following the passing of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IRIRA) of 1996, which led to increased enforcement and securitization at the U.S.-Mexico border as well as an increase in raids, detention and deportations nationwide. They did not have to live near the border to feel the impact of federal policies, as state and local enforcement policies made many communities unwelcoming for immigrants. Neither did they have to be immigrants themselves to be affected by enforcement and the growing nativist sentiment that targeted “Latino looking” people.

Another formative moment for many Latino millennials was the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 which further fueled anti-immigrant sentiment and exacerbated restrictive immigration policy and enforcement in the form of the Homeland Security Act of 2002.

Despite a restrictive political environment, Latino millennials also witnessed the unprecedented mobilizations for immigrant rights that swept the nation during the Spring of 2006 (see Voss and Bloemraad 2011; Pallares and Flores-González 2010). HR 4437—popularly known as the Sensenbrenner Bill—which sought to turn undocumented status a felony and to criminalize anyone who assisted the undocumented, prompted many millennials to engage politically for the first time by joining these mobilizations (Flores-González 2010). These mobilizations also crystalized the meaning of citizenship and its protections, and marked many Latino millennials’ initiation into politics. While Latino millennials supported the election of Barack Obama to the presidency with hopes that he would deliver comprehensive immigration reform, Obama’s presidency has stepped up immigration enforcement and carried out unprecedented numbers of deportations furthering Latino racialization. These social and political events have profoundly shaped how Latino millennials understand their place in U.S. society.
The Study

My interest in this topic comes from a mixture of personal and professional experiences. Despite being a U.S. citizen by birth and being “assimilated” in many dimensions—highly educated, English proficient, intermarried, middle class, living in the suburbs—and being a light-skinned Latina that “passes” as white as long as I do not speak or reveal my name, I do not identify as American nor as white. This is partly due to being born and raised in the Island (Puerto Rico) where “Americans” are clearly defined as (mostly white) people from the mainland. But to a large extent it is also due to my experiences as a Latina in the mainland where my “otherness” comes out in daily interactions. During almost two decades as a professor and researcher, and despite being a Generation X’er, I find that my former X’ers and current millennial U.S-born Latino students also feel at odds claiming an American identity. I also found this feeling among Latino youth who participated in the massive immigrant rights mobilizations that took place in Chicago in 2006 and 2007 (Flores-González 2010). In-depth interviews with 60 U.S.-born Latino youth who participated in these marches showed that their participation was motivated by their and their family’s exclusion from the imagined American community (see Flores-González 2010). Many of the youth talked about being “U.S.-born but not American”, or being a “different kind of American.” Wondering if this sentiment was shared mostly by those who are politically active, or if it is a widespread sentiment among Latinos, I developed a second set of interviews that delved more deeply into issues of identity and belonging among 96 U.S.-born Latino youth, both participants and non-participants in the immigrant rights mobilizations. From this second set of interviews emerged a more complex picture of the impact of racialization on Latino
subjectivity as *citizens but not Americans*. Although informed by the first set of interviews, this book is based on the second group of interviews.

My analysis is based on 96 in-depth interviews with U.S.-born Latino millennials in Chicago from February to May 2009. The criteria for participation was being a U.S.-born citizen of Latin American ancestry between the ages of 14-30. Participants varied in generational status: 75 were second generation, 22 were third generation and 1 was fourth generation. National origin distribution among participants roughly resembles the composition of the Latino population in the Chicago area: Mexicans 70%, Puerto Rican 7%, Ecuadorian 2.6%, Guatemalan 2.6%, Colombian 2.6%, Cuban 1.7%, Dominican .8%, Peruvian .8%, Costa Rican .8%, Argentinian .8%, Bolivian .8%, and the remaining 9% of mixed national origin (Mexican/White, Mexican/Puerto Rican, Mexican Guatemalan, Mexican/Cuban, Puerto Rican/Brazilian, Mexican/Argentinian). Sixty of the youths grew up and live in the City of Chicago, 26 grew up in the suburban CMA, 6 were from satellite cities (Aurora, Joliet, Peoria), and 5 grew up out of state (one of the youths did not provide this information). While the sample contained five high school students, the bulk of the participants were young adults. Sixty-two of the youths were college students, 13 had college degrees and were employed in professional jobs, 18 youths had not attended college and worked in factories, technical, sales, or service jobs. Fifty-three were young women and 45 were young men. Only four of the youths were members of mixed status families (at least one parent is undocumented) and the rest had parents who were citizens by birth or naturalization, or had permanent legal residency.

Participants were recruited by referral and snowball sampling in which undergraduate research assistants used their social networks to identify potential participants. This strategy resulted in the recruitment of Latino youths living in different contexts within the CMA—
ranging from Latino city neighborhoods to white suburban communities. Expanding recruitment
from the city to the near suburbs yielded participants from a single Latino national origin as well
as youth from interethnic, interracial, and mixed status families. The interviews ranged in length
from 40 minutes to 1.5 hours and were conducted in English. All participants were assigned
pseudonyms and in some instances a few details about their lives that are not consequential to the
analysis were altered to ensure confidentiality. All interviews were transcribed and initially
coded to identify general themes by the undergraduate students. I conducted four additional
rounds of coding: with the initial round focused on identifying general themes, the second round
on breaking down these themes into subthemes, a third round to further analyze these subthemes,
and a fourth round that focused on each thematic category as a whole. In addition, a research
assistant recoded the interviews checking for consistency and accuracy. The interview guide was
divided into five main areas: Demographics, Identity, Family History, Transnational Links, and
Political Socialization and Participation with particular questions on their views, engagement and
participation in immigration related issues. In this book, I focus mainly on the Identity section,
which includes questions on self-identification and the meaning given to ethnicity, race,
citizenship and Americanness, and the impact that everyday racializing experiences have on
identity. While I center on the Identity section, the data presented and the analysis draws also
from other sections of the interviews.

Organization of the Book

In this introductory chapter, I have presented the three themes that marked these youths’ sense of
alienation from political and social membership in the American imagined community, situated
my study within the broader theoretical frameworks on race and belonging, and provided
methodological and analytical details of this project. In the rest of the book, I delve deeper into why and how the Latino millennials whose stories are portrayed here understand themselves as *citizens but not Americans*.

Chapter 2 it provides a detailed account of these youths’ encounters with everyday racism. I frame this chapter as the racial politics of race and space in order to examine how the physical and cultural characteristics that make Latino millennials visible also mark them as racial, cultural and national others. This othering in turn casts doubts on their right to belong in particular places and spaces marked as white and erodes their feelings of belonging.

Chapter 3 examines the complexities of ethnic and racial identification among Latino millennials. In this chapter, I provide a critique of the conceptual split of ethnicity and race in sociological theory by arguing that these concepts fail to capture how Latino millennials think about their social categorization. I posit that Linda Martin Alcoff’s (2009) call to think of Latinos as an ethnoracial group provides a more suitable framework for understanding the social positioning of Latinos in a society in which race is a primary means of social categorization, and where not having a suitable racial category makes Latinos invisible and marginal, contributing to the feeling that they are *citizens but not Americans*.

In chapter 4, I put to the test popular assumptions about the racial structure as a binary characterized by a sharp color line dividing whites on top and blacks at the bottom, or as a tri-racial structure with a single intermediate “catch all” racial middle. Latino millennials conceptualize themselves as one of multiple intermediate racial categories occupied by Asians, Latinos, Arab Americans and American Indians respectively. They also conceptualize Latinos collectively as a racial middle but individual location along this racial middle varies according to personal characteristics, most notably skin color and phenotype. Overall, I argue that to continue
to subsume Latinos under the white or black side of the color line, or lump them together with other groups in the racial middle, glosses over these youths’ particular experiences of racialization and contributes to their sense of racial exclusion and marginalization from the American imagined community.

In Chapter 5, I examine how Latino millennials conceptualize the political and social aspects of belonging to the American imagined community. Despite being citizens by birth, these youths do not meet the ethnoracial markers associated with Americanness and thus face exclusion in their everyday lives. Elaborating on the cultural citizenship framework, I argue that these youths engage in what I call ethnoracial citizenship by deploying familiar American tropes to challenge their exclusion and demand to be seen and treated as ‘Americans.’

Lastly, Chapter 6 brings together these three themes—Latinos as an ethnorace, Latinos as racial middle, and Latinos as “real” Americans—to provide a theoretical alternative to current discourses on race and belonging. Bringing race front and center, I utilize the case of Latino millennials to show how particular events shape the ways in which this population makes sense of their place in U.S. society.